IN WOMEN'S INTERESTS:
FEMINIST ACTIVISM AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

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Women's Research Centre
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Despite the difficulties, it is extremely exhilarating and rewarding in a weird way to help a woman through this, and see her make the change from victim to survivor. It is also so important that we are here to provide this – I'd hate to go through it alone and no one should have to. It is also most discouraging to finally get a chance to educate some of these institutional-types, and then after all your effort and overcoming your terror, to have them ask their typical questions; like "did you bomb Red Hot Video?"

– A rape crisis worker on working with police

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INTRODUCTION

In the feminist movement over the years debate has ebbed and flowed on the proper relationship of reform and revolution. Every few years it seems we ask ourselves the same questions: is reform a sell-out, is separatism a cop-out, should we shoot men, ignore them or try to reason with them? When we look at the systemic oppression of women we sometimes ask ourselves if it is possible to change the system so fundamentally or should we just turn our backs on the whole mess? We ask ourselves if women can afford to wait for revolution as we watch ourselves struggle just to survive. For the most part we don't come down categorically on one side or the other. In our most optimistic moments we might believe we can achieve "fairness" for women through adjustments in the system. In our bleaker moments we despair that nothing short of armed insurrection will bring about the liberation of women. In general, though, we steer a middle course: while recognizing the need for a fundamental restructuring of society, we nonetheless struggle for small changes which will allow more women to survive better in the world as it is.

Feminist groups working for social and political change inevitably come up against the state and its power and authority. The state's influence in women's lives is both wide-ranging and profound. For many women—women escaping their battering husbands, unemployed women trying to feed their kids, whole communities of women terrorized by anonymous rapists—state action can be literally a matter of life and death. Accordingly, institutional change is an important and unavoidable issue for feminists. It is not possible to ignore or avoid the state and its institutions. We recall the words of an old anarchist poster: "What we want is not the overthrow of the government but a situation in which it gets lost in the shuffle." No matter how fervently we may wish for that day, we're not there yet. In the meantime, we need to analyse our experiences with the state and its institutions in order to better inform our strategies for change.

Feminists often seem to respond to the state in a rather ad-hoc fashion, without a clear analysis of why we do what we do or what we

might conceivably accomplish. It is an understandable tendency, given the state's ability to set political agendas and given the constant pressure for feminists to move on to the "next" issue. Our work tends to be reactive. Especially for those of us whose work is in providing services to women, it seems there is never the time to reflect on our experience, to think about where we have been and where we want to go. Writing in a very different context, political theorist Hannah Arendt proposes a simple and profoundly important activity: "to think what we are doing."[1] In this booklet it is just such an activity we engage in and encourage other feminists to take up; namely, a reconsideration of the state and institutional change in light of our experience, our efforts and our successes over the years. We propose to think, and hence to learn from, what we have done and what we are doing.

In previous Women's Research Centre projects, particularly *Feminist Action, Institutional Reaction* and *Just Give Us the Money: A Discussion of Wage Discrimination and Pay Equity*, we've documented how feminists have identified and raised awareness about issues of concern to women and have analysed how and why institutions respond to feminist demands for change. Out of our own work, and through learning about the experience of other feminist groups we've worked with, we have come to recognize the need for discussion of the goals, methods and evaluation of feminist strategies for institutional change. Accordingly, we present this account as one contribution to that discussion.

Assumptions

We began this project with a set of assumptions – previously-held beliefs – about the subject of institutional change:

1. The first assumption concerns necessity. Notwithstanding our recognition of the state's role in perpetuating women's oppression, the fact is the state exists and its institutions have direct power over women's lives. We believe that if part of the mandate of feminism is to improve the conditions of women's lives, then as feminists we have no choice but to work with the state and to try to influence how state power is exercised. To turn our backs on the state, to refuse to deal with "our oppressors," is to

abandon women in the interest of purism. We can and must seek to change what the state does in women's lives and how it does it.

2. So the question "why work for institutional change?" is answered: because it serves women's interests. The more difficult question is "how?" It really is two questions. First, how do we work with institutions while maintaining our feminist principles? Second, how do we work *effectively*, i.e., create some changes in the way institutions respond to women and women's issues? Our second assumption is that both these things are possible.
3. Our final assumption has to do with method. We assume that in order to succeed in creating changes which will benefit women, feminists need three things:
   a) a clear analysis of the state and its institutions;
   b) a clear understanding of why we do the work of institutional change;
   c) consciously thought-out goals and objectives and resources deliberately organized to achieve them.

While not sufficient to guarantee success, these three are necessary conditions for our work.

Coming out of these assumptions our purpose in this project has been to identify the issues involved in institutional change, to trace what is required and what works, and to point to future possibilities. Our intended audience is feminist groups, particularly those working directly in providing services to women, which are or are considering working with institutions. We also speak to feminists in general who are interested in feminism's analysis of and relationship to the state and its institutions.

Subjects

In this project we sought to learn about one feminist group's experience with one institution. We chose the group – Women Against Violence Against Women Rape Crisis Centre (WAVAW/RCC) – because it seemed to us to have an extensive and relatively successful history of work with an institution, namely the police. For many the police constitute the ultimate manifestation of the state in all its coercive, regulatory and ideological modes or functions. Whether or not

that is the case, it is true that the police are a *typical* state institution. How a police force operates, the interests it promotes, its accountability, and, most importantly, its reaction to community-based women's groups are all by and large common to all bureaucracies. The example, then, of WAVAW's work with the police can serve as a paradigmatic case of institutional change; that is, by looking at WAVAW's work with the police we can learn lessons which we can apply to our work with other institutions and bureaucracies.

What we are engaged in in this project is not an evaluation of WAVAW's work with the police. We might say in passing that if evaluation were our purpose we would begin by stating that given the chronic overwork, underfunding and understaffing of feminist service organizations, WAVAW's willingness and ability to take on any work in addition to its principal mandate is noteworthy. That they have done so so well—so consistently and successfully—is a testament to the commitment and skill of the women involved. Rather than evaluation, our purpose in this project has been to discover the commonalities—the likely problems, considerations, useful strategies, etc.—of institutional change. From the outset we believed WAVAW's experience could be practically instructive to other groups. That remains our belief. Of course, no strategy is perfect; inevitably difficulties arise, things are forgotten, unseen or unplanned for. These too we can learn from. Hence, in documenting WAVAW's experience we have included not just their successes but also their occasional problem areas, in the belief that all experience holds for us lessons for the future.

The WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre was founded in Vancouver, B.C. in 1982. It is Vancouver's second rape crisis centre. The first, Rape Relief, is still in existence, but by 1979 it had ceased to provide services such as advocacy and accompaniment normally associated with a rape crisis centre. In fact, that centre's failure to provide such services and refusal to be held accountable to the feminist community for its actions were what brought WAVAW/RCC into existence. The founding members of WAVAW/RCC had all formerly worked in the earlier centre. Over the years, many of them had left, or been forced out, as a result of the direction Rape Relief had taken internally and externally. In founding WAVAW/RCC these women sought to restore a feminist service to which all women have a right.[2]

Services provided by WAVAW/RCC include a 24 hour crisis line, counselling and referral, and accompaniment and advocacy with the medical profession, police and courts. The Centre is operated by a collective consisting of paid office staff and trained volunteers. All Collective members take regular shifts on the crisis line. Work such as public education and volunteer training is performed by committees of the Collective. Representation on and liaison with external bodies is the responsibility of individuals, either paid staff or volunteers. For the purposes of this project the position of police liaison person is especially noteworthy. She is responsible for all contact with police beyond that which occurs in the course of crisis work.[3]

Methodology

In documenting WAVAW's experience with the police we began by examining files held by WAVAW, the Vancouver City Social Planning Department, and by the provincial Ministry of the Attorney-General. More than anything these gave us a sense of the history of WAVAW's relations with police and directed our further questioning. We then conducted a lengthy interview with a police officer who has had extensive dealings with WAVAW/RCC and shorter interviews with workers from two other feminist service organizations to get a sense of how other groups work with police.

Of course, most of our information came from the WAVAW workers themselves. Early in the project we informally interviewed four current or former Collective members. We then conducted a "Round Table"—a half-day workshop involving workers who have held the police liaison position. The discussion there ranged from the origins of WAVAW's police liaison work to hopes and plans for the future. The bulk of our questions, though, focused on a description of the work itself—the tasks involved, resources needed for the tasks, the skills and personal qualities of a good police liaison person. We also asked about WAVAW's accomplishments and why they view institutional change as important and worth doing.

We recorded and wrote up the workshop and used it as the basis of our description of WAVAW's work with the police. We supplemented the workshop with written questionnaires completed by workshop participants and other WAVAW workers with experience in police liaison. Finally, we followed up questions which arose either in

the workshop or in the questionnaires with brief interviews with the workers involved.

Not surprisingly, at times recollections of events differed among the workers. Occasionally we had to clarify when a particular discussion workers referred to took place, in what context and with what result. Differences of opinion regarding details of WAVAW's history reminded us of what feminists so often talk about but so rarely do adequately, namely, document our history. Because memories fade, because the holders of memory move on, it is vital that groups have available a written record of their debates, plans, activities, etc. Even minutes of meetings can prove invaluable years later. In the case of WAVAW, when differences of recollection arose – and for the most part they were differences of emphasis and sequence – we looked first to the files and if these proved less than definitive, we tried to incorporate the various recollections, including their differences, in our description.

In our literature review we found that very little material exists on the subject of institutional change. On the specific subject of feminists and police, two unpublished papers – one by Deborah Bradley and Ellen Frank, the other by Megan Ellis – were particularly helpful. On the subject of the state and the institutionalization of women's issues, works by Jan Barnsley, Catharine MacKinnon and Sue Findlay provided an essential framework for our thinking. Full citations appear in the Bibliography.

We believe more thought, more discussion and more documentation are needed. If we are to continue to refine our analysis we need more accounts of feminists' experience with institutions. We need more discussion of the issues involved in institutional change. We need to continue, as Arendt says, " to think what we are doing."

DEFINITIONS

Feminists pay attention to language. We know how language is used to mask women's reality, as when wife beating is called "domestic violence" or "interspousal conflict." We see how language sometimes is used to deny women's very existence – "mankind." If part of feminism's project is to give voice to women's experience – to describe and hence make real and intelligible – then we must choose our words carefully, ensuring that we both say what we mean and mean what we say. We need to be aware of the assumptions which underlie language choices – assumptions which can affect our work and its reception. And we need to be clear with each other about what our assumptions are. With this in mind this discussion begins with some definitions of terms we think are important in talking about institutional change.

The State

Among feminists there is no consensus as to the definition of the state, either of what it consists or of its role. Some feminists include in the state all social and societal institutions – everything from the criminal justice system to unions to marriage and the family. Other feminists take a much more narrow view, restricting their definition to government and supporting bureaucracies. Some feminists, usually identified as liberal feminists, seem to consider the role of the state to be that of a neutral mediator and arbitrator among competing social interests and interest groups. Others, particularly socialist and some radical feminists, seem to focus almost exclusively on the state's role as an instrument of class and sex oppression.

Defining the state is vitally important to the feminist project. In order to track and analyse patterns of domination and specific expressions of oppression, we must be able to identify spheres of control among the structures and institutions of society. Furthermore, our ability to develop effective strategies for change is enhanced if we keep in mind both the unity and disunity of the system as a whole.

A useful beginning place is what is often called the "dominant forces" of society. These are usually identified as capitalism and patriarchy. The word patriarchy literally means rule by fathers. It suggests a system of hierarchy based on gender, age and familial status. We consider this an inaccurate reflection of women's experience. Regardless of the systems of hierarchy which occur among men—age, class, race, etc.—in our society every man has power over every woman. For this reason we prefer the term "andarchy," which means the rule of men.

As dominant forces, capitalism and andarchy pervade all aspects of social life, including the state. Their specific expression, though, varies depending upon the structure or even institution involved. Each such structure has its own territory, its particular area of interest and sphere of control. Consider the following example:

To the individual woman, the coercive power of the church in regulating her access to birth control may seem no different from the power of the government to make laws concerning abortion. From the point of view of feminists the situations are similar: in each case a male hierarchy uses its ideological authority and, if necessary, sanctioning power, to control a woman's life and choices.

Despite this similarity the situations are not the same. They differ in both the origin and area of the particular institution's power and authority. If I am not a member of the church then its ideological influence on me is at least indirect. More importantly, I am out of the reach of its direct sanctions. The same is not true of the law or government, whose sanctions apply to all citizens. I can leave the church; I can't leave the state.[4]

Additionally, the structures and interests within capitalism and andarchy are not unified. As Sue Findlay comments,

> While the interests of capitalism and patriarchy [or, we would say, more precisely, andarchy] might dominate at the societal level, the internal conflicts and competition within and among these forces make it impossible for them to impose a unified position on the state, or to defend their interests against opposing interests in the political sphere. *The role of the state then is to organize a unity of interests among the dominant groups and disorganize potential challenges to this unity.* (emphasis mine)[5]

For the purposes of this discussion we consider the state to consist of government at all levels, supporting bureaucracies, the military, police, courts and prisons. Its sphere of control is law and public policy-making. Semi-autonomous institutions such as the education system, universities, and the health care system fulfill some of the regulatory functions of the state but exist formally independent of it.

Ideology

Ideology has to do with ideas, with what is thought and how it is expressed. The word is commonly used to describe the ideas of political and economic programmes or systems. Marxism sometimes is called an ideology, as are liberalism and feminism. When used in this fairly neutral sense ideology has two key features: a description and explanation of the world as it is, and a vision for the future.

Marxists tend to take a much more negative view of ideology. To them it is not just any set of ideas but one which is used to legitimize and consolidate a particular economic and hence political order—capitalism—and to quell dissent by presenting that order as "natural." By this definition ideology has three main functions: "to legitimate, to mystify, and to console."[6]

Like the Marxists many feminists see a controlling function in ideology. It is a form of control with which women are particularly well-acquainted, for it has to do with how we think and talk about ourselves and the world. It is based in language. Adelle Mueller and Jennifer L. Newton say that ideology is "the social organization of the forms of knowing and consciousness—symbols, concepts, vocabularies—by which people are able to think about the world."[7]

Missing from this definition is a clear identification of the agents and authors of ideology and their motives. The essence of ideology is thought control in the interest of dominance. It is produced by members of dominant groups or classes for use by others in naming and explaining their own experience of the world. Its function, as Dorothy Smith comments, is to "order, legitimate and organize social relations and the socially relevant aspects of experience."[8]

Hegemony

Related to ideology is hegemony. It describes the ascendancy of an economic or gender class in all social spheres—the economic, the

political and the ideological. Through such pervasive dominance the ascendant class is able to "persuade other classes to see the world in terms favourable to its own ascendancy."[9] It is a form of internalized oppression. As Findlay comments,

> Hegemony is the construction and maintenance of an ideology in the interests of the ruling class that is sufficiently reflective of the realities of most people that it is internalized *as if* it reflected their own interests. Coercion or repression is unnecessary as long as this ideology can be maintained.[10]

Once achieved, hegemony is sustained through the control of institutions.

Institutions

Institution is one of those odd English words that has too many different meanings. Sometimes by institution we mean the act of foundation or beginning, as when we speak of the institution of a new policy. Sometimes we mean an establishment or even a particular building—a "mental institution," an "institution of higher learning." Sometimes we use the word to connote importance and to convey the sense that something or someone has always been there: "Mary is an institution in our women's centre."

There are two senses in which we use the word in this booklet. The first is that of a formal organizational structure which has wide social influence. Government, the media, and the health care system are examples of institutions in this sense. The second sense is much more informal and ideological. It has to do with established practice or convention, the purpose of which is to organize and regulate relations among people. Such institutions are non-voluntary associations which persist whether or not they are accepted by the individuals within them. They are governed by rules which in some cases are supplemented by law. Their existence is generally unquestioned and their effects invisible. Marriage and the family are two examples of this kind of institution.

What these two kinds of institutions have in common is that they order and sanction social relations so as to constitute and reinforce patterns of dominance. They are also the sites and deliverers of ideology. It is within the family that we first learn female submissiveness, a

lesson reinforced daily by the media. As Jan Barnsley states: "institutions are ideological structures which provide the framework for our lives, teach us how to think and behave and control us . . . "[11]

Control

Control has two meanings, depending upon its objects. Controlling things is a matter of degree – I control my car to the extent that I can do with it what I wish. Such control may be limited by other agents or factors such as law – I must drive within the speed limit – and facts of nature – I can't make my car climb stairs.

Control of people – particularly in the case of "social control" – refers to the ability of one agent to define, prompt and limit the actions of another. It is distinct from influence, which can be ignored and which results in actions apparently freely chosen. It is also distinct from coercion inasmuch as it lacks the element of overt force or compulsion. Furthermore, control tends to be more general than either influence or coercion, governing many actions. It also tends to be more long-term – a structural feature of the ongoing relationship of the controller and controlled.

Authority

Authority refers to the right to act, as opposed to the ability to act. Politically, it is linked to both legitimacy and control. Political theorist Hannah Arendt comments that the hallmark of authority is "unquestioning recognition by those who are asked to obey; neither coercion nor persuasion is needed." [12] It depends upon respect, either for the person or for the office or position.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is the perceptual side of authority. It has to do with what people *believe* is allowable or acceptable, particularly with regard to the actions of government. It is linked to agency of the state, i.e., the extent to which the state can be held responsible and answerable for its actions. The imposition of the War Measures Act in 1970 was both authorized – the government had the legal right to do it – and legitimate – the majority of Canadians at the time considered it an acceptable action. Today that action is no longer con-

sidered by many to have been legitimate though the authority of government – both the government of the day and government generally – remains unquestioned. Legitimacy is a primary goal of governments, particularly in liberal democratic states. A government which loses its overall legitimacy quickly loses its right and ability to govern other than by force.

Power

As authority is the *right* to act, so power is the *ability* to act. More particularly, power is the ability to act in concert with others. For this reason power always resides with the group, as opposed to the individual, though it may be exercised by an individual acting in the name of the group. Thus, when we say that in our society every man has power over every woman, we speak not of differences of individual strength, but of the collective ideological, economic, political and social power of men as a gender-class embodied in and supportive of the individual male.

Men are said to have power in our society because of their collective ability to act in their own interest. Similarly, institutions and structures such as the state are powerful – that is, they are able to act – because they are backed by class and gender interests. Collective power makes possible the control of people and things. Conversely, control consolidates and increases power.

Institutional Change

In this study we will not consider possibilities for the dismantling and building anew of whole institutions or systems. The sort of institutional change we are concerned with here is much less ambitious and, accordingly, more readily obtainable. For the purposes of this discussion the definition is restricted to alterations in the policies and procedures of institutions in matters of concern to women. It is less *what* they do than *how* they do it. For this reason legislative reform – matters of substantive change – is specifically excluded from the definition. In B.C., the Attorney-General's 1983 wife assault policy, which among other things directs police to arrest battering men, is an example of a significant institutional change. There was no change in the law; what was changed was the *policy* of enforcement and the *procedure* for laying charges under the existing law.

Of course, most changes are less sweeping than this. A more common example is that of a local hospital agreeing to establish a specialized medical team for sexual assault victims, one which consists of women doctors sensitive to the particular needs of these patients.

Feminism and Feminist Service Organization

This is not the place to go into a full exploration of what it means to be a feminist. Suffice to say that in this booklet the term feminist is applied to individuals and organizations that, starting from the experience of women, recognize women are oppressed in all aspects of our society. By analysing women's experience of the world, particularly in relation to the state, it is clear women's oppression is both systematic and institutionalized. Feminists are committed to working to end that oppression. That commitment is expressed both in the issues we choose to work on and in how we work and live our lives.

Over the past twenty years Canadian feminists have created a wonderful array of organizations: consciousness-raising groups, study groups, political action groups, women's centres, support groups and on and on. Only one type—feminist service organizations—will be discussed in this booklet. These are groups whose primary function is to provide assistance to women in need in the community. Often this involves some kind of crisis intervention work. Other kinds of work, such as public education and lobbying, are generally also present, though considered secondary to the work of crisis intervention, advocacy and accompaniment. The relationship of service-providers—paid or unpaid—and service consumers is more formal than what occurs in a consciousness-raising group, but is not typified by the kind of radical division of, say, the social worker and client. Additionally, the service providers derive their expertise from their experience as women—particularly, women trained in and doing the work—rather than from academic training. Rape crisis centres and feminist-run transition houses are prime examples of feminist service organizations, though certainly the definition is not restricted to these.

WAVAW'S WORK WITH POLICE

Women Against Violence Against Women/Rape Crisis Centre has worked with area police forces – municipal and RCMP – for the past six years. During that time the Centre has successfully negotiated changes in a number of police policies and procedures concerning sexual assault victims. For example, area police forces now accept third party reports. These are anonymous reports of sexual assault which the police use for "intelligence" purposes. Though charges cannot be brought as a result of third party reports, they serve to apprise police of individual rapists – their practices and in some cases even their identities – and/or high-risk areas. Another example is that police now accept the presence of a rape crisis worker at police interviews of rape victims. Additionally, police are willing to conduct follow-up interviews either at the rape crisis centre or at the woman's home whereas in the past almost all interviews took place at the police station.[13]

Though reforms of these kind won't put an end to violence against women, they can and do make a significant difference to individual women's experience following a sexual assault. For the rape crisis workers they are hard-fought victories. In the following pages we will describe the essential elements – the thought, planning and organization of resources – that went into winning those victories.

Beginnings

As we noted in the Introduction, WAVAW/RCC was founded because Vancouver's earlier rape crisis centre had ceased to provide many of the services women expect of a rape crisis centre. In particular, that centre refused to have dealings with the police, to the point that they would not accompany women who wished to report a sexual assault and actively discouraged women from reporting. Accordingly, WAVAW's beginning was marked by an assumption that they would do that work. When, however, the founding members of WAVAW came to discuss *how* they would work with police, inevitably

the question of *why* arose again. In the months before and immediately after WAVAW opened some members debated whether the organization should work with the police on a structural level. They were committed to doing the front-line work of accompanying and advocating for individual women who wished to report a sexual assault but would they go beyond that, to seek out an organizational relationship with the police? In other words, would they adopt a strategy of institutional change? As described by one of the founding members, the arguments, or at least hesitations, expressed were of three kinds. The first was time: "Are we going to take our valuable time teaching the boys how to interview survivors of sexual assault?" Second was effectiveness: Collective members who had worked in other rape crisis centres knew the obstacles the criminal justice system presents to sexual assault survivors—"we had lost a lot of cases"—and felt "really sour" about the possibilities for change. The third concern involved perceptions of other feminists: "We thought some of the community would be upset with us. They would see us co-opting with the police [that is, co-operating to the point of allowing ourselves to be co-opted] and police are one of the most hated institutions."

As we will discuss later in this booklet, the rape crisis workers consider support from other feminist groups to be an important element in an organization's struggle for institutional change. What is interesting is that the founding members apparently were not worried that in co-operating with the police they might be vulnerable to co-optation. Because many of them had had experience prior to 1979 of working with police as Rape Relief members, they knew what the limitations and possibilities were. Accordingly, their confidence in their ability to avoid co-optation came not from arrogance but from the knowledge and expertise born of experience. Their concern was only that others might see them as liberal or worse. Given that few other feminist service organizations do work closely with institutions and given the history of the earlier rape crisis centre's charged political statements to the feminist community on their own refusal to have any dealings with the police after 1979, the WAVAW women's concern was understandable.

Against these arguments was and is the argument of necessity. Throughout their description of their work the rape crisis workers we

interviewed returned again and again to the same point: we do it for the women.

> Basically we decided we were going to work with the police because we decided if we're going to be a rape crisis centre we had to give women every choice possible. That's the bottom line. If women don't want to report that's fine, but if they do we wanted to have a means so that that reporting was made easier. The only way that means would work would be to set up a liaison with the police.
>
> I believe we work with institutions because we must give women the most we can.
>
> We have to support a woman in her decision and give the best service we can.

These comments go to the core of what it means to be a feminist: putting women first and taking direction from women, i.e., deriving our analysis and strategy from women's experience. It follows, then, that *how* a feminist organization works with institutions must also be guided by women's interests. In describing what they want to accomplish in working with police the rape crisis workers detailed reforms which empower women. Specifically, they have sought changes which for sexual assault survivors result in better access to information, based on the belief that knowledge is power, and an environment of safety and respect within which to make decisions.

Knowing what changes to advocate comes from listening to women. WAVAW's original "shopping list" to the police derived not from some theoretical analysis of how things "ought to work," but rather grew directly out of their own and other women's experience. For example, one of the rape crisis centre's first requests to police was that the workers be allowed to review the standard questions used by police in interviewing rape victims. They then proposed revisions to those questions. The workers knew to ask for this review and revision because women had told them of the difficulties – the insults, hostility and even threats – they'd experienced in police interviews.

As this example shows, a theoretical commitment to women's empowerment is not sufficient. Empowerment must be seen in practical terms, based concretely in women's experience. It must be realistic in

the fullest sense, that is, directed at real and immediate changes in the conditions of women's lives.

The work of institutional change, then, must begin with a clear understanding of the role institutions play in women's lives and a solid grounding in why the work is necessary. The next step is identifying goals and objectives, the general and specific reforms deemed important to women. Then the work of getting those reforms begins.

Initial Work

WAVAW/RCC is funded primarily by the provincial Attorney-General's ministry. Though co-operation with police is not spelled out specifically as a condition of funding, the workers believe that their expressed willingness to do so was instrumental in WAVAW first being awarded a contract. When WAVAW set about establishing a liaison with police, the workers asked the Attorney-General's ministry, which at the time was responsible for police services,[14] to write to all area police detachments announcing the rape crisis centre's opening. The workers themselves telephoned all detachments to introduce the Centre. They then had the Attorney-General's ministry set up meetings between the rape crisis centre and the various detachments.

In both their initial and their ongoing work with the police the rape crisis workers viewed the role of the Attorney-General's ministry as crucial. They listed "a powerful funding body" as a needed resource for their work, and noted in particular the advantage of being funded by a branch of government directly responsible for police services. They see it as their "ultimate weapon" in putting pressure on the police. In the workers' view, the police had "no choice" but to meet and work with them once directed to by the Attorney-General. It was a case of using inter-institutional relations to get a foot in the door. It may be that police met with the rape crisis workers initially because they were pressured to do so by the Attorney-General's ministry. How well they worked, though, is another matter, one which could not be dictated from outside.

As described by one of the original members of WAVAW, a large part of the early meetings with police was spent "rehashing myths" about sexual assault. Whether or not that was the stated purpose of the meetings, it seems inevitable that in discussing policies and procedures concerning sexual assault, the subject of myths would have to

be addressed. For the rape crisis workers this involved identifying and challenging erroneous beliefs commonly held by police officers and others such as the belief that prostitutes can't be raped. The work was difficult—in fact, one worker characterized it as at times "disgusting,"—but it did lay the necessary groundwork for the next step: listing demands. At the request of the Attorney-General's representative, the rape crisis workers set out in writing the changes in police policy and procedure they wanted. Of these they won an estimated forty per cent, the most important of which was acceptance of the presence of a rape crisis worker at police interviews with sexual assault victims if requested by the woman.

After the preliminary round of meetings involving the police, the Attorney-General's ministry and WAVAW—a process which took months—agreement was reached on an ongoing mechanism of contact. It was agreed that direct liaison would be carried out by one police officer and one rape crisis worker who would meet without representation from the Attorney-General. The purpose of this direct liaison was to implement the agreements reached and protocols established and, in particular, to "discuss any problems which might arise in relation to personnel performance or attitudes."[15] This agreement marked the transition for WAVAW from the initial phase of their work with police to ongoing work.

Ongoing Work

A basic component of ongoing work is selecting and training the Centre's police liaison person. There seem to be no hard and fast rules on selection; in the Centre's earliest days the position was filled by an unpaid worker, since 1984 it has been negotiated among the paid staff. Flexibility has its advantages, inasmuch as, at least theoretically, only those most able and willing will take on the work. The drawback, however, is that when the work is absent from a specific job description, it can understandably feel like an additional burden rather than an integral part of a worker's job. Given that the Centre's principal mandate is to provide service to women in need, and given the demands and the urgency of that work, any other work *is* an "add-on." The point, however, is that when a group makes a policy decision—such as a decision to work with police on a structural

level—that decision needs to be consciously articulated in the group's allocation of resources, including staffing.

The workers described the training of the police liaison person as a matter of "passing the knowledge down," particularly with regard to the history of police relations. It is a method common to most feminist groups, i.e., women working together informally telling each other about their experiences and what they have learned from doing the work. Again, though, informality can be something of a problem. More than just background knowledge is required; there needs to be formal training in how actually to do the work of police liaison. While they recognized the detrimental effects of "throwing someone into police liaison work" without background or training, the workers admitted that, because of the pressures of other work, that is sometimes precisely what happens. Having identified the concern in the course of this project, the workers said they intend to pay more attention to it in the future.

The work of the police liaison person can be divided into four broad categories:

1. The first is ongoing contact with police, intended to "keep everything working." It involves periodic telephone calls to remind police of the Centre's existence, offering praise and encouragement when warranted, and generally paving the way for specific requests and complaints.
2. The second category is handling complaints in either direction. When a problem arises between individual crisis workers and police officers, the police liaison person checks the specific incident with the worker involved, relays that information to the police contact, and hopefully negotiates a resolution to the problem.
3. The third category is training and is of two types. The first is arranging police attendance at the rape crisis centre's training of its workers. The second and more difficult type is police training, both new recruits and staff development for experienced officers. The purpose of this is twofold: to make line officers aware of the services provided by the rape crisis centre and to clarify misconceptions about sexual assault. The first hurdle is getting permission to attend; most police training is "in-house" and community organizations are not normally invited to participate.

Once permission is obtained—a matter which must be negotiated for each training session—the police liaison person is responsible for preparing materials and enlisting other rape crisis workers to assist with the training itself. The workers have learned from experience the difficulties which arise when one woman tries to educate up to forty bored/derisive/openly hostile men about sexual assault. Accordingly, WAVAW normally sends four workers—two to speak and two to observe. The observers provide moral support for the speakers, act as witnesses to the proceedings, and, by observing more experienced workers, themselves receive training in this aspect of police liaison work.

4. The last category of work is largely internal to the rape crisis centre. It is communicating information to and from Collective members both about specific interactions with police and more generally about why and how the Centre works with institutions. It also involves updating knowledge and communicating with other rape crisis centres regarding police relations. Much of this communication work is done in a rather ad hoc, catch as can fashion. The workers said the police liaison person often must "chase" individual rape crisis workers to check on specific interactions. Updating knowledge is done as time allows and communication with other rape crisis centres regarding police relations tends to be an add-on to communication on other matters. The only formally structured piece of this work is the discussion of how and why the Centre works with institutions, which is presented in a two-hour talk given during the training of new workers.

Given the pressures of crisis intervention work and the chronic underfunding and understaffing of feminist services, it is not surprising that this aspect of the work gets squeezed in when and where it can. Feminists doing crisis work often just don't have the time to read or even to talk to each other. Sharing knowledge and experience, both within and between feminist groups, is, though, vitally important to our ongoing development of strategies for change.

Resources

As mentioned above, the rape crisis workers considered a powerful funding body an important resource for the work of institutional change. Equally important is backers within senior management of the particular institution, in this case the police. Given the hierarchical organization of institutions, it makes sense that the general climate of relations and degree of openness to change will be influenced by the attitudes senior officials hold. This may be especially true of the police, given its quasi-militaristic structure. For feminist organizations the difficulty is access to the senior people. One rape crisis worker we interviewed, speaking of feminist groups generally, said:

> The other part we don't have access to is ensuring it works from the top. One problem fighting [to change] institutions is we seldom get to the people at the top. We always start at the bottom as that's the only access we have.

In this the WAVAW experience may be exceptional, for their earliest liaison meetings involved the Chief of the Vancouver Police Department and other senior officials. As alluded to above, the workers attributed this unprecedented access to intervention by the Attorney-General and his staff.

There is no foolproof solution to the problem of access. In an unpublished paper Deborah Bradley and Ellen Frank suggest that the best place to begin a strategy of police liaison is by learning about the structure and personnel of the particular department and then making initial approaches to the person at the top. For example, they suggest writing to the Chief proposing the establishment of formal liaison and requesting specifically to meet with the Chief and other officers responsible for the particular area of concern.[16]

In a similar vein the rape crisis workers suggested "good press contacts" can be a useful resource. While it is something of a truism that good media relations in general are "a good thing," it is particularly important in working for institutional change. The rape crisis workers saw two effects of frequent and positive media coverage. The first is to apply some outside pressure for movement by the institution. This does not mean stirring up controversy, which often has the effect of making institutions more intransigent. It is more a gentle ur-

ging that the institution respond to initiatives taken by the organization, or at least recognize that there is a problem which the institution should respond to if only to win positive coverage for itself. The second effect was expressed in terms of generating credibility for WAVAW, giving it a higher profile, and demonstrating community support for the organization and its work.

Funding bodies, contact with management personnel, and press relations are all resources external to the organization. Even more important are internal resources. The rape crisis workers said it is essential first that the organization have a strong policy on working with institutions and second that among its members there be strong commitment to that policy supported by consensus. In practical terms this means that the policy is known by all members and that the procedures developed to put that policy into practice are accepted, understood and followed consistently by all. For the workers we interviewed having such policy and commitment meant being able to "count on your Collective not to screw up," that is, being confident Collective members understand and support the policy and will follow the procedures established for dealing with police. It also meant "working collectively, especially respecting the work of the police liaison person." Such respect includes referring problems with police to the police liaison person and generally trying not to undermine, even inadvertently, the work she does in maintaining good relations with police.

Another internal resource is experience. The rape crisis workers stressed the importance of having access to women who had gone before, so to speak, their predecessors in police liaison work. These include women no longer active in the Collective. In part this is "passing the knowledge down," providing the background and history of the work. Equally, it is a way of overcoming isolation and of staying clear about the purpose and importance of the work. One worker, herself well-experienced, told the following story: "The last time we did the police training I had to call [a former worker] up and say 'Tell me again why we work with police.' I must have been having a bad week . . ." Of course, this worker hadn't forgotten the policy. What she needed and got was a "pep talk" from someone who knew both the frustrations of her task and its importance.

As a final comment on resources, the rape crisis workers look to other feminist organizations for "support, understanding and involve-

ment." They said it is important that their work with the state and its institutions be recognized as valuable. In part it seems the workers here were describing and reacting to what they see as the invisibility of their work with police. More, though, their concern seemed to be one stated earlier, that is, that other feminists might interpret their willingness to work with police as an opening for co-optation. The workers believe it is possible to work with the state while maintaining one's feminist principles and wanted that acknowledged by other feminists. More than acknowledgement, though, the workers called for active support which, we would suggest, includes positive challenge—comment, criticism and suggestion to make the work better. Lastly, the workers thought their work toward institutional change would be enhanced if other feminist organizations took up parallel strategies—working directly with institutions in order to improve the visibility and credibility of feminist services and thereby further women's interests. As one worker remarked:

> It shouldn't be exclusively up to a group like WAVAW to pave the way to improved relationships—that's everybody's responsibility.

For a time WAVAW was involved in an attempt at co-ordinated structural liaison between police and local feminist service organizations. The Women/Police Liaison Committee was established through the City's Social Planning Department in 1983. Some groups, such as WAVAW and Vancouver Transition House, had formal representation on the Committee while others were informally connected through individuals. The Committee's purpose was

> To effect and facilitate a positive working relationship between the Vancouver Police Department and women (as individuals and as members of community based organizations) working on violence against women, and to develop practical measures to provide maximum protection for women.[17]

The Committee was an important attempt at developing a common front among feminist groups in their dealings with police. Real gains were made, particularly in the area of police handling of wife assault calls. In 1985, however, the Committee collapsed. Whether because of the pressures of other work or simply a loss of interest and will by all parties, the Committee just stopped meeting.

Success and Its Elements

WAVAW's greatest inroads into police policy and procedure were made relatively early in its history. In the workers' view a number of factors account for this. The first is timing: it is significant that the rape crisis centre's opening coincided with the establishment of a sexual offences squad within the Vancouver police department. A similar policy of designated investigators for sexual assault was beginning in some RCMP detachments in outlying areas. Another factor is—paradoxically enough—the poor relationship police had with the earlier rape crisis centre. That relationship had reached the point of outright antagonism and a refusal on the part of that centre to work with police at all. In contrast, WAVAW from its outset stated publicly its willingness to co- operate within certain bounds, thereby making it a welcome alternative from the police perspective. Both the police officer and the rape crisis workers we interviewed commented on this.

Both these factors are more than mere happenstance. Certainly, they are part of a unique situation which groups in other communities could not and would not want to replicate. They do, however, speak to the general issue of institutional receptivity. The WAVAW women recognized an opening existed and further encouraged a receptive attitude by demonstrating to the police how the rape crisis centre could make their job easier. For example, an RCMP officer told us that when the RCMP initiated the designated investigator policy, the new investigators were desperate for information. As the "experts" on sexual assault the rape crisis workers had valuable information and expressed a willingness to, in one worker's words, "teach the boys." Similarly, by being willing to assist women who wish to report a sexual assault, the WAVAW women increased the likelihood of reporting and hence, from the police perspective, increased the likelihood of successful investigation leading to charges. Given the newness of the policy of designated investigator, these officers may have been particularly anxious for "successes" to prove the worth of the policy and, accordingly, justify their special status within police ranks. Any community resource which offered to assist them in their quest for credibility was likely to get a receptive hearing.

It is important to recognize that in these two examples the actions of the rape crisis workers were undertaken first and foremost because they were in women's interests. The point, however, is that the actions

were and were presented as being in police interests also. Coupled with a credible media image this appeal opened some doors, making a receptive hearing more possible and likely.

Another factor which contributed to the rape crisis centre's early success with the police has to do with personalities and relationships between individuals. The Centre was fortunate enough to encounter a few "exceptional cops" in a couple of local detachments. In an unpublished paper Megan Ellis describes how both the hierarchical organization and occupational culture of police forces contribute to attitudinal cohesiveness among police officers. In particular, she describes the training and advancement of police officers as "a process of acculturation, of learning language and ritual, of reading and reproducing acceptable behaviours."[18] Very often the result of such acculturation is the development of attitudes and behaviours typified by rigidity, territoriality and xenophobia—distrust of outsiders. The "exceptional cops" the rape crisis workers encountered seem to have suffered less from these kinds of attitudes than many of their fellows. They quickly saw the advantage of co-operation with the Centre and, testing the limit of their own organization's procedure, risked trying new ways to get the job done. Testing, too, the powerful but unwritten fraternal code of police subculture, they encouraged other officers and other detachments to modify their attitudes. For their part the rape crisis workers risked trusting these officers—not immediately and certainly never blindly, but more than what caution born of experience would ordinarily advise. For both sides the risks paid off.

The workers also told us of the importance of prior relations with the police. They spoke of one early worker in particular who, because of other work over the years, had developed a good relationship with some individual officers. She was in a sense a known quantity to the police, someone they knew they could talk to. Over time a few other rape crisis workers developed similar relationships of friendliness, good communication, and some sense of trust, especially with the "exceptional" officers. Looking back on those early days, both workers and police stressed to us the value of those individual relationships in overcoming in-bred suspicion on both sides.

Of course, as the saying goes, all good things must come to an end. As both the police and the rape crisis centre staff changed, as they inevitably do, the individual relationships upon which so much was built

were largely lost. Their existence had created an expectation of the conduct of organizational relations and their loss a vacuum. This is not to say that the rape crisis centre was mistaken in developing and deriving benefit from relationships between individual workers and police officers. To institutionalize relations such that the only contact is organization to organization, with positions rather than people meeting, has its own problems. There must, however, be a recognition that things do change, that the specific people involved will not always be there. In part this means building in transition time in which new staff can begin to establish relationships with their counterparts before the old staff leave. In part it just means recognizing and making allowances for the fact that overall relations will run more or less smoothly depending upon the people involved. Most importantly, it means that protocols – agreed ways of doing things – must be written down. While it is true that ultimately agreements and policies are only as good as the people who implement them, it is also true that in the short run such written statements can carry organizational relations, laying out the framework and paving the way toward building relationships with the new staff.

The last factor seen by the workers as contributing to successful police relations in the Centre's early days is the priority given the work. One early worker said "I was on the phone with [the police contact] probably fifteen times a week." In contrast, the workers said in recent years they have not put into police liaison work the time and energy required, with the result that relations have "drifted somewhat." They explained this loss of priority as being a result of increased demands in the Centre's crisis work. The matter is something of a quandary. On the one hand, the pressures of crisis work mean that police liaison work has been let slide. On the other, crisis work itself is made more difficult and time-consuming by the fact that relations with the police are distant, if not actually strained. As one worker commented, "Because of the lack of time, resources, people, etc. the service doesn't improve in terms of police – it doesn't improve the way that it could." Perhaps in the long run it would be more efficient and effective to keep up with police liaison even though it may, at first glance, seem a less urgent piece of work, so that the crisis work can proceed relatively unimpeded.

This is borne out, at least to some degree, by the workers' discussion of the need for persistence, consistency and constancy in police

liaison work. They said, for example, that having neglected "maintenance" work with detachments in outlying areas, relations have slid to the point that the original work now must be re-done:

> . . . meanwhile we have an incredible problem that crops up from Abbotsford, another in Surrey, and another in Richmond and its like you totally, totally lose it. You think, 'where do I start?'

> . . . we've not done the maintenance required for all these outlying areas so we've sort of lost that. We're probably going to have to go back and re-do everything back to the beginning.

By definition ongoing work doesn't stop. The task of implementing agreements once reached and maintaining relationships once established requires consistent attention. It is small things done repeatedly. As one worker remarked,

> It's that constant calling up and reminding that we're here . . . it needs that constant reminder, it needs that chit chat, it needs the small talk as much as it needs the 'what the hell's happening here' kind of stuff.

Constancy is needed, too, within the rape crisis centre collective. It is not enough to have once debated the question and arrived at a policy on institutional change. In the workers' words, "There always has to be ongoing discussions in the Collective about priorities," that is, discussions about how the organization's resources are allocated and, more importantly, about why specific areas of work are important. This is particularly true given an ever-changing membership. In the current WAVAW collective no one took part in the original discussions on working with police. For the Collective as a whole to remain clear about why they do what they do, those discussions must be repeated regularly.

Personal Perspectives

For the police liaison person as an individual, there are personal costs attached to this work and personal strengths required. There are also personal rewards though these may be less obvious. The rape crisis workers told us that one of the hardest aspects of their work is simply dealing with the physical presence of police officers, most of whom are male. As rape crisis workers, they are all too familiar with the pervasiveness of violence against women in our society. They know that men of all classes and occupational groups rape women, batter their wives, use pornography, sexually abuse children and on and on. They know it is not usually possible to tell if a man is a rapist, batterer, etc. just by looking at him. And they know that even men who are not physically violent always have access to male power, including the power of intimidation which derives from sheer physical size and strength. For the rape crisis workers, as for all of us, male police officers are men like other men, except that these men have been given "uniforms and guns and that much power."

Some workers spoke of the frustration of trying to educate police around sexual assault and of having to constantly challenge anti-woman remarks made by officers in passing. This latter is particularly difficult "when you have to say something [in response to such remarks] that will risk your relationship with the cops, WAVAW's relationship and will risk the woman not getting a fair shake." The struggle is one of weighing the need for more or less amicable relations with line officers versus the need to speak, to not through silence condone the belittling of women. The workers also spoke of being treated disrespectfully and of sexual harassment by police officers, both of themselves and of survivors.

One worker described a different kind of challenge: "learning to accept yourself and your mistakes." Knowing how important the work is, and how much the odds are stacked against women, it is sometimes hard to remember that forgiveness begins at home, and that even rape crisis workers engaged in institutional change are human.

The skills and personal qualities the rape crisis workers identified as valuable in a police liaison person follow logically from their description of the work itself. Some are obvious: tolerance, patience, tact, diplomacy, good speaking skills. Others are less immediately apparent, though no less important. Of these, some can be characterized

as skills of emotional control, for example, "the ability to put aside your personal feelings about police," and "anger management." Others relate to strength and maturity. The workers said they needed "self-confidence and self-esteem" because so often working with police is a "degrading experience." Similarly, they spoke of the ability to "humble yourself." Perhaps most importantly the workers spoke of the ability to "talk about [emotional reactions to the work], to be honest enough with yourself to talk it out." And, we would add, having a forum in which to do that talking with co-workers and Collective members.

Most fundamentally, it is necessary to have a solid grounding in the work itself. According to the workers, this begins with "experience in the Collective," meaning that before undertaking a specialized area of work such as police liaison, a worker should be well-versed in the aims of the rape crisis centre and in its ordinary operation. More particularly, they said what is required is a "willingness, desire and commitment" to do the work. The workers said that to have "the ability to stand your ground" a police liaison person must "believe wholeheartedly in the policy [of working with police and seeking institutional change]." Just as it is important for the organization as a whole to have a strong policy and commitment, so too it is important for the individual primarily responsible for that policy's implementation to believe in what she is doing.

We asked the rape crisis workers what the experience of police liaison work had taught them about themselves. Some of their responses reveal if not negative then at least unpleasant self-awareness: "I have limits re: tolerance, time, work"; "sometimes I trusted the police when I shouldn't have—a lesson in gullibility"; "I'm not assertive enough to do the work effectively." Though difficult, these insights are valuable to the individual. Fortunately, positive responses outnumbered the negative ones:

> I'm patient and I'm very good [at] getting what I want and not giving up too much of what I believe in. I think I would be a good negotiator.
>
> Despite my intense bias about the police, I was still able to sit across a table from them and be clear.
>
> I'm not afraid to come to terms with the things or people who intimidate me and why.

> Another lesson about how it is possible to do well that which is terrifying and very important./ind

These are some of the personal rewards of the work. We would add to the list the satisfaction of knowing one's work makes a difference for women.

Summary

Taken as a whole, the rape crisis workers' description of their work with police can be divided into five broad categories. The first category is initial work, the central elements of which were:

1. that the decision to work with police was discussed extensively before any action was taken;
2. that the workers took advantage of inter-institutional relations to get a foot in the door with police;
3. that having established their credibility through challenging myths about sexual assault, the workers set out in writing their demands for changes in police policy and procedure.

Thought and planning, then, were the keys to initial work.

The second category is ongoing work. It begins with the selection and training of the police liaison person. Her tasks consist of ongoing contact with police, handling complaints, co-ordinating elements of training both for workers and for police, and communicating information within the Collective and with other rape crisis centres. It should be noted that these tasks are in addition to normal duties—crisis intervention, counselling, public education, administration, etc.—of paid staff. That some are done rather haphazardly as time allows is no surprise but does present an ongoing problem. The solution, of course, is to make police liaison a full time position. In the absence of money to do that, though, formal recognition of the tasks—a job description—and greater clarity on the priorities and relationships among various aspects of the rape crisis centre's work would certainly help.

The third category within the rape crisis workers' description refers to resources needed to do the work of police liaison. External resources include other institutions, access to and support of senior

management personnel, good press relations and the support and involvement of other feminist service organizations. For internal resources the workers emphasized a strong policy on working with institutions and commitment among members to enact that policy. They also discussed the experience of other women as an important internal resource.

The fourth category consists of factors seen as contributing to the rape crisis centre's early success in working with police. One factor was the workers' ability to recognize and capitalize on an atmosphere of institutional receptivity. They did this especially by presenting their initiatives as being in the institution's interests. Another important factor was personalities and individual relationships between some rape crisis workers and some police officers. A third factor was the priority given the work—a subject which arose again in the workers' discussion of the need for persistence, constancy and consistency in the work.

The last category in the workers' description is the personal perspective of the police liaison person. Within this category the workers described the personal costs attached to police liaison work, the strengths required—including tact, patience, self-confidence and anger management—and the rewards of the work, particularly in terms of self-awareness.

Though the situation the workers describe is unique—one feminist service organization working with one institution—we believe their experience is instructive. In the next section we'll consider what general lessons can be drawn from that experience.

WHAT THE WAVAW EXPERIENCE TEACHES

In analysing the description of WAVAW's experience in police liaison, two issues stand out as central to the work of institutional change. The first is knowing why we do the work: we do it for the women. This in turn implies two positions: first, that we must take seriously feminism's commitment to women; we must listen to and believe what women tell us about their lives, and we must ensure that both our analysis and our action grow out of and are grounded in women's experience. Second, using our own and other women's experience, we must build and refine an analysis of the state and its institutions and the role these play in women's lives.

Like so much of feminist method, the process of translating our commitment to women into concrete action involves asking and answering questions. For example, a feminist group considering working with a state institution might begin by asking itself the following:

1. What have women told us about their experience of this institution, situation, issue?
2. What patterns or themes emerge; that is, what common elements do we see in the various experiences women have described to us?
3. From the above, what can we say about how the institution operates and why? In other words, what is our analysis of the information?
4. How do we locate this institution within the larger ideological structure of society? In other words, what does our analysis of the specific institution teach us about the role institutions play in the perpetuation of male dominance? Equally, what does our existing analysis of women's oppression teach us about this institution?

Answers to these questions can help a group decide upon a general strategy or, as in the WAVAW example, a policy vis-a-vis the institution. It is a process of listening to many women's individual stories as we advocate on their behalf, adding up those many women's experiences, and interpreting and analysing them in order to develop a basis for our work.

Goals and Objectives

Equally important, answering these questions can provide us with the material out of which we can identify goals and objectives of the strategy. It is important to distinguish between these two. Goals are general statements about what the group hopes to accomplish by the strategy adopted. Some examples might be: "To change how this institution responds to women and women issues"; "To make this institution more accessible and accountable to women"; "To get women better treatment." Objectives are much more specific. At the Women's Research Centre we define objectives as "specific, measurable statements of what you, your group or project want to accomplish by a given point in time."[19] Recall the rape crisis workers' description of their "shopping list" of demands. It included such items as "acceptance of the presence of a rape crisis worker at police interviews"; "review and revision of police interview questions"; "changes to allow follow-up interviews to take place outside the police station—at the rape crisis centre or the woman's home." These are objectives.

Being clear about why we do the work means keeping women's interests at the forefront of our thinking. Simply by asking "how does this fit with women's experience" at each stage of the process of strategy development and implementation, we can stay the course, avoiding the shoals of both co-optation and purist inaction. In short, in our work of institutional change we can be both effective and true to our feminist principles.

Persistence, Constancy, Consistency

The second issue which stands out from the rape crisis workers' description of their experience is that in our work of institutional change we need persistence, constancy and consistency. These three are separate but clearly related. Persistence is necessary because in-

stitutions and their personnel are resistant to change. Constancy is needed because things done once don't stay done; repetition, particularly as an aspect of maintaining relationships, is called for. Consistency—in practical terms, a strong policy which is known and followed by all—is an obvious necessity.

Taken together, these three suggest that once adopted, a policy of seeking institutional change should be given formal priority. No such policy can be successfully advanced in an ad hoc fashion; rather, it must be formally recognized and integrated into the overall work plan of the feminist service organization. Concretely, this means including institutional liaison work in a written job description, developing a system for regular reporting, doing follow-up both with workers and with the institution, and ensuring that information is written down and circulated both inside the organization and to "outsiders."

Monitoring and Evaluation

Knowing why we do the work, goals and objectives, and the persistence, constancy and consistency required lead to the question of success. How can we know when we have succeeded in our work of institutional change? Given the nature of the work, the short answer is we can't. Because the work is ongoing and because often results are indirect, determinations of success and failure are neither appropriate nor feasible. This does not mean that evaluation is not possible or useful. The point is that in this work the measurement is not absolute. It is not a question of clear cut success or failure but rather of standards and degrees of success. Certainly, if a group sets out to get a particular policy changed by a certain point in time it can measure whether or not that is achieved but in general, in the area of institutional change we don't categorically win or lose.

Related to evaluation is the need for monitoring. Particularly in this sort of work it is important to keep track of whether and how agreements and protocols are implemented. In our example, the rape crisis workers needed to monitor police responses to third party reports to ensure that the agreement was followed, i.e., that such reports were accepted and acted upon. Monitoring also provides information about whether initiatives achieve what they were intended to achieve and hence provides direction for future initiatives.

Monitoring, then, is an ongoing activity. It contributes to but cannot replace periodic evaluation. Evaluation really means taking stock—stepping back to look at what has been done, how and why it has worked, and where and how the work can be improved. It can help in maintaining perspective by reminding us of where we started, why we do what we do, and where we want to go. It can make visible work that too often is invisible even to those directly involved in the work, as well as to those who only support it. In a process of reassessment it can show if we're still on track in what we set out to accomplish or if we've changed direction and if so why. Evaluation can give us a way to recognize how specific external factors—events, organizations, individuals—have affected our work for good or ill and what we can or should do about these in the future. And in the allocation of scarce resources, evaluation can help us to set priorities, ensuring thereby that all of our work gets the best attention we can give.

Isolation

Knowing why we do the work and paying attention to the need for persistence, constancy and consistency are necessary but not sufficient conditions for a successful strategy of institutional change. In other words, though essential they are not enough. Other issues must also be addressed. For example, another issue raised by the rape crisis workers' description is isolation. Individual workers responsible for police liaison said they often felt isolated from co-workers. They also said that at times the organization itself is or feels isolated from other feminist groups. Obviously, in both cases communication is essential. This too, though, must be structured in. Regular reporting and circulating information may help combat the individual's isolation inside the organization. For the organization as a whole monthly or bimonthly meetings with other local feminist service organizations may be in order. This is not possible, of course, when "you're the only game in town," that is, when your group is the community's only feminist organization or the only one involved with institutions. Then regular contact with regional associations—B.C. and Yukon Society of Transition Houses, Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses, Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres, etc.—may be the avenue. In either case, the point is to bring together groups

which deal with the same or similar institutions to share concerns, build analysis and develop joint strategies where appropriate.

Personalities and Individual Relationships

As described by the rape crisis workers, the matter of personalities and individual relationships is something of a mixed blessing. In most bureaucracies exceptional individuals can be found—people who, though they are fundamentally tied to the institution's mandate and way of seeing, are sometimes willing and able to step outside the bounds of normal bureaucratic functioning. Countless feminist initiatives have been assisted by such individuals—the City Hall bureaucrat who pushes through a funding proposal for the local women's centre, the policy analyst who tells groups when there is an opening or possibility for change, the social worker who releases statistics supporting feminists' demand for more and better services for battered women, the police officer willing to listen to and learn from rape crisis workers. Their advice, advocacy and just plain openness can be and often are invaluable to our work. Others within the state apparatus, while sticking fairly closely to the rules, at least may be convinced to give us a fair hearing. In both cases establishing trust and building relationships are well worth the time and effort required.

There is a danger, however, in coming to rely too much on individuals within institutions. Even the most supportive institutional insider is constrained by the structure, function, mandate and interests of the institution. She can push the rules to the limit but she can't break them. Ultimately, her accountability is to her employer—she must adhere to the institution's values and programme or risk losing her credibility or even her job. No matter how well-intentioned, no matter how much she personally supports the feminist cause, her allegiance must remain with interests different from ours.

Additionally, as we noted in the previous section, personnel changes inevitably occur. The new staff may be indifferent to the issue and/or to the feminist group working in the area. They may be openly antagonistic and intransigent on matters of procedure. Even with those who might be receptive it takes time for them to get to know and develop confidence in their community counterparts. On the other side, the feminist service organization that depends too much

on one of its member's personal relationship with people in the system is at a loss when she leaves the group.

To repeat, these problems do not mean that a feminist group working with an institution should not seek out individual relationships with their opposites, especially the "rebel" bureaucrats. Those relationships *are* valuable and individuals—within institutions and within feminist service organizations—*can* make a difference. The point is to avoid relying too much on things which are unavoidably transient and impermanent, on people who work for "the other side." Handshake deals may work in the old boy's network; in the long run, they don't work for us. Agreements we secure and protocols we get adopted must be put in writing, first so the information isn't lost when staff change, and second to keep things going in times when the less formal, personal approach is not possible or working. Simply put, sticking to a policy of "get it in writing" is a way of protecting and preserving the small gains for which we work so hard.

A related issue is that of backing both from other institutions and from senior management personnel within the particular institution. As with the above, it is a matter of identifying and finding ways to work with allies while remaining clear about the limits of their role. Some feminist service organizations have attempted a kind of reverse co-optation by inviting senior institutional personnel to participate in the organization by, for example, sitting on its board. It is our experience that such a tactic does not work and often creates more problems. First, it places the individual in a position of at least potential conflict of interest. Because women's groups and institutions have different interests, sooner or later issues will arise which require the individual to choose between the group and the institution. In such situations loyalty to the institution will have to take precedence. Second, it shifts the location of struggle—struggle between the state's paradigm and programme and ours—from the public realm to the relative privacy of board meetings. Third, it forces us to take valuable time in board meetings educating, raising consciousness and persuading when we should be able to use the board strictly as a support for our work. Fourth and most important, we risk giving control of our organization to people who are trained in and tied to interests which are fundamentally at odds with ours.

Institutional Receptivity

The last issue which stands out in the workers' description of their experience is that of institutional receptivity. The workers attributed their early success in part to a coincidence of timing. Recent events – the formation of a sexual offences squad in VPD and designated investigator policy in the RCMP, a deteriorated relationship with the earlier rape crisis centre – contributed to a degree of openness within local police departments. What was crucial, however, was the workers' ability to recognize and capitalize on that atmosphere to further their own objectives and women's interests. They could not *create* an attitude which didn't exist within the police but they could and did encourage and build upon what openness they found. In part they did that by concretely demonstrating their willingness to co-operate. More particularly, they showed how their interests and police interests coincided, at least on specific initiatives. They argued – accurately and justifiably – that the police could fulfill their mandate more easily and effectively with the assistance of the rape crisis centre; simply, that a general climate of co-operation and specific changes in policy and procedure would make the officers' jobs easier. That, of course, was not their primary goal. As we noted in the previous section, the initiatives the workers took were chosen specifically and exclusively because they were in women's interests. Here the point is that the workers found a way to talk about those interests as meshing with police interests on specific issues.

Though they didn't use these words, what the workers describe in this area is old-fashioned political analysis and tactical development. They didn't lie or induce co-operation under false pretenses; neither did they wait passively for things to happen. They looked at the existing situation – political climate, recent history, the institution's priorities and immediate concerns – and developed tactics which took advantage of those elements of the situation which favoured getting the changes women needed.

Summary

Overall, all these issues speak to the general issue of control. In one way or another each "lesson" the WAVAW experience teaches is an example of feminists taking control of our own political process. In part that means simply being aware of what things we control and what things we don't. By planning and making allowances for things we don't control, paradoxically enough we take control – at least what control is possible. In other words, by knowing always what we *can* do, what we *are* doing, and *why* we are doing it, as well as knowing what we *can't* do, we are able to maintain an active stance. We can follow our own agenda consistently, rather than simply reacting, and we can even react more effectively when the unexpected occurs, as it inevitably does.

The example of WAVAW's experience with the police shows how much very valuable information exists within women's groups on the subject of institutional change. We need more accounts of women's groups' experience with institutions, more documentation, more analysis. The development of feminist theory and analysis, and feminist strategies which derive from those, is an ongoing process. We can and should continue to learn from our own and other women's experience as we struggle to change the world.

FEMINISM AND THE STATE

The state is interested in control and legitimacy. Feminism is interested in the liberation of women. These interests do not intersect and are in fact fundamentally at odds. Even in those cases where particular institutions and feminist groups co-operate in certain projects, their purposes in so doing are very different.

Catharine MacKinnon claims that "the state is male in the feminist sense."[20] This means the state views the world from the male perspective. It also means the state uses its coercive, regulatory and ideological power to enforce that view and to advance and protect the interests of men as a gender-class. Finally, it means the state's method of operation is a male method.

Consider the structure and function of state institutions, as typified by the police. Both formally and actually, police forces are organized as hierarchies. Individual members are identified by rank, lines of command are clearly laid out and followed, and decision-making is centralized. Things are done "by the book," and the system of advancement through the ranks ensures that only those well-schooled in that "book" are given the power to make decisions. Emphasis is placed on professionalism – police officers are the only "experts" on crime and officers of higher rank are more "expert" or "professional" than those of lower rank. As Megan Ellis comments,

> While this hierarchy serves to delineate the boundaries between 'them' and 'us,' it also serves as a framework for the internal bureaucratic structure, imposing rigid divisions along the lines of seniority and specialization.[21]

Functionally, police forces exist to reproduce and enforce the social order. Whatever threatens that order is subject to police sanction. Accordingly, crime is defined not by the victim's experience of harm, but by the perception – by the state, the police force, and/or the individual officer – of a challenge to the established order. The non-arrest and non-prosecution of wife batterers is a glaring example of this.

Now consider the structure and function of feminist service organizations. Most use some kind of collective structure and are committed to equality among members, decision-making by consensus, job rotation and skill-sharing. Though not necessarily anti-professional, feminists groups traditionally hold that experience not formal training give women the expertise to work on women's issues. That is, in calling someone "expert" feminists look to her experience in the area, not her formal credentials. The function of feminist service organizations is to promote some aspect of women's empowerment – the right and ability of women individually and collectively to make choices about our lives.

Clearly, these two categories of organization – state institutions and feminist groups – occupy different constellations in the political universe. Their respective designs, purposes and ways of seeing are worlds apart. How, then, are they able to co-operate without fundamentally compromising either their beliefs or their structures? Given the imbalance of power and resources, the question is really how do feminist groups avoid such compromise?

To answer this we must first consider the challenges which face a feminist service organization in its dealings with the state. Pressure to change a collective structure – particularly as a condition of funding – is a common problem. A case cited in *Feminist Action Institutional Reaction* is that of the Ontario government's 1983 "standards of staffing" requirement for funding transition houses, which specified that funded houses must have a supervisor with a higher salary than staff.[22] Similarly, pressure is increasing to "professionalize" feminist services by requiring that workers have academic credentials. Again, this pressure is often linked to funding.

More subtly, but ultimately more dangerously, feminists and feminist groups are pressured to change our language. With changing language comes a redefining of the issue, which inevitably means a masking of women's experience. We are asked to be "polite," to be "reasonable," to be "objective," all of which means "don't rock the boat, see the world from men's point of view." As the writers of *The Feminist Manifesto* comment:

> Articulating our experience is a radical act – words such as rape, pornography, battery, incest, racism, poverty, homophobia and abortion are not polite words in the vocabulary of those who have power. Translating these words

> (e.g., sexual assault, obscenity, family violence) may sound more polite, but it will only disguise the problem and serve to obscure temporarily the ugly reality of patriarchy, a reality which feminists have worked so hard to uncover.[23]

The function of language is the communication of thought, vision, emotion and analysis. Changing our language to match that of our listeners may seem an aid to communication—how I talk to my eight year old nephew rightly is different from how I talk to his mother or to my co-workers. In working for institutional change, though, the listeners are representatives of the state, for whom language is an ideological tool, that is, a tool of control and mystification. When I follow their lead in the choice of language I participate in a lie. When, for example, I say "domestic violence" when I mean "wife battering," I am hiding the fact of who beats whom and am denying my knowledge of that fact. And in adopting their language, in not challenging it, I give my permission for its obfuscation and misrepresentation to be treated as truth.

Another challenge to feminist groups comes, ironically enough, when we are invited to participate in state processes. It is, of course, the danger of co-optation, the insidious process by which outside critics are transformed into inside supporters and participants. Thomas Mathieson, a political and legal theorist, describes it simply:

> In the first place, you are invited to try to *persuade* the representatives of the state, rather than to struggle for demands. Secondly, you are invited *to show by example* how things should be done, again rather than struggling against the way in which things are being done. In the third place, you are invited to *participate* in the decision-making process of state representatives.[24]

Co-optation, then, is a process of silencing by inclusion. It is a testament to the flexibility, adaptability and resiliency of the state that it is able to absorb its critics without fundamentally shifting the status quo. It is an expression of hegemony, the ability of the ascendant class to persuade other classes that their interests can be promoted by promoting its own.

The last challenge relevant to this discussion is an inverse corollary of the above. If co-optation is a danger to feminists so too is fear of co-optation. As Charlotte Bunch comments,

> Purism taken to its extreme results in immobilization and cynicism; if we cannot achieve the final good now, then we feel we cannot do anything at all because it might be co-optable.[25]

To successfully meet these challenges is hard to do but easy to describe: know the players and know the game. First and foremost that means knowing and constantly remembering who we are. The "we" is both feminists generally and specific feminist service organizations. Knowing who we are includes remembering in whose interests we act and remembering why what we do and how we do it promotes those interests. It also includes knowing what our bottom lines are—the places where we cannot compromise if we are to continue to be who we are.

Consider, for example, the issue of structure. It is no accident that feminist groups have developed collectivism as our model of organization. Even at this point in our history, its use is or should be more than mere habit. Briefly, in our work we adopt collective structures because they address issues of power and empowerment. We modify the structure to meet particular needs and/or situations—designating one person to do police liaison, for example—but retain the principles of equality and consensus. Those are bottom line matters, matters which go to the heart of our analysis of and commitment to women's empowerment.

The flip side of knowing who we are, of course, is knowing who the other players are. This begins with identification: which institutions are involved in the particular issue we want to address, what are their relationships among themselves and to the state as a whole? Then, what is their mode of operation, what role do they play in women's lives, what are their interests generally and on this issue specifically?

Finally, knowing the game means having some analysis of the state itself—its priorities, functions, ideological commitments, modes, and responses to dissent or criticism. Knowing the game includes knowing how the state typically responds to initiatives or issues raised by non-state entities, particularly, of course, feminist groups. And knowing the game means knowing that the rules are not fixed, that adaptability is a hallmark of the state and its institutions and, accordingly, that our analysis must continually change and develop.

We began this section with the statement that the state is interested in control and legitimacy. All states and state forms share these concerns though their relative degrees of importance vary. They are, though, overarching concerns, separate from though expressed in whatever are the issues of the day. How these concerns are translated into practice varies somewhat depending upon the general political climate, issue and interest group involved, however some general principles hold.

The state's interest in control extends to things—technologies, information, weapons, processes—and people. In both cases the point or object of control is the maintenance of the established order—a hierarchical system of differential access to intellectual and material resources in which power and authority reside with the few. In Canada, as in many other states, the established order is shaped by and oriented toward the perpetuation of both capitalism and andarchy.

Instruments of control range from the coercive—the organized violence of police and military—through the regulatory to the ideological. Such instruments cannot be exercised, however, in the absence of authority which in turn depends upon legitimacy. In liberal democratic states such as Canada, legitimacy revolves around the *appearance* that the state is representative of all people and that it is responsive to the needs and interests of all groups, dominant and dominated.

Because of its need to maintain the appearance of universal representation the state (and its institutions) cannot simply ignore feminists' demands for change. For the state the challenge is to respond to those demands while containing and constraining them such that they do not pose significant threat to the dominant interests. The techniques by which this is accomplished are familiar to many of us: stalling ("we'll need to study the matter"); jurisdictional buckpassing ("it's not in our mandate, it's the responsibility of some other department/ministry/level of government"); blaming ("if more women would report sexual assaults we could do something about changing our procedures"). The key, though, is what has been called the "institutionalization of women's issues."

This rather unwieldy phrase refers to the process by which institutions take up issues raised by feminists and translate them from political issues into social problems which can be accommodated without

fundamentally challenging the status quo. In addition to literally changing the language used to describe the issue, very often the process involves establishing institutional structures to deal with the "problem" – structures which obviate feminist analysis and practice.

A prime example of this is the increasing trend toward institution-based "victim/witness" programmes. When feminists began to speak out on the second victimization inflicted upon sexual assault survivors and battered women by the criminal justice system, the state responded by establishing in-house services. Located within police and court structures, these services are designed to be generalist – serving all victims of all kinds of crime without distinction. Though purported to complement existing community-based services such as rape crisis centres and transition houses, in fact these state-run services are in direct competition both for funding and for referrals. The advantage of these services, from the state's point of view, is that whereas feminist services maintain as a fundamental premise the need for basic societal change, institution-based services adopt the values and structures of the institutions of which they are a part. They therefore present no challenge to the established order. Increasingly feminist services are called upon to justify their very existence as the state itself claims to be meeting the needs of victims.

It is important to note that these techniques do not represent an anti-feminist "conspiracy" within state apparatuses. They are not the result of deliberate manipulation. Rather, they are part of the normal bureaucratic functioning of the state and its institutions, facts of bureaucratic life. In other words, inasmuch as individuals within institutional bureaucracies are un-self-consciously both the subjects and objects of ideology, they do not deliberately set out to thwart our efforts; rather, they are "just doing their jobs." In our strategy development and implementation we need to keep these facts in mind.

All this does not mean, though, that the state is immutable in all respects and that, accordingly, any strategy of institutional change is bound to fail. Precisely because of its ongoing need for legitimacy the state is susceptible to demands for reform. It *is* possible for feminists to effect changes in institutions' responses to women and women's issues – changes which can make a real difference to the lives of individual women.

CONCLUSION

The example of the WAVAW/Rape Crisis Centre's work with police demonstrates some of what is possible. It is, in the very best sense, feminist praxis, for it both creates immediate change and amelioration in the conditions of women's lives *and* contributes to feminists' advocacy of and work toward a radical restructuring of society. It is work undertaken on our terms, not the state's, and work that is in our interests.

The WAVAW example teaches that more than anything else what is needed is clarity. We need to be clear about why we do the work of institutional change, in whose interests it is and how what we do advances those interests. We need to know about what we can expect from the state and its institutions both in terms of deflection and of real reform. We need to set and follow our own agenda rather than trying to fit ourselves into the state's agenda. We need to make for ourselves goals and objectives and to organize our resources, internal and external, to meet these. We need to monitor and evaluate our work and the reforms it brings, neither overestimating our "successes" nor dismissing them. We need to learn from our own and other women's experience of the state and institutional change. We need to continue to think what we are doing.

FOOTNOTES

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.5.
2. While Rape Relief is significant to WAVAW/RCC's history, and while its attitude toward and experience of police relations provides an interesting counterpoint to WAVAW's, in this booklet we do not undertake an analysis of Rape Relief. On Rape Relief's place in WAVAW's history see "Vancouver Feminists Withdraw Support From Rape Relief," *Kinesis*, May 1982.
3. In addition to the Collective two other structures exist within the WAVAW/RCC organization. The first is the Society. Made up of both former and current Collective members, the Society meets annually and is the policy-approving body of the organization. Second, a Board of Directors, elected by the Society and consisting of Society members not currently active in the Collective, is responsible for the general management of the Society. In addition to normal duties such as negotiating employment contracts with the paid staff, the Board is charged with ensuring the Society "continues to operate in a co-operative manner" (Article 4(e) By-laws) and with mediating conflicts within the Collective when so requested.
4. At least, I can leave the church formally, though as "recovering" Catholics attest, not ideologically, at least not easily.
5. Sue Findlay, "Facing the State: The Politics of the Women's Movement Reconsidered," p.3.
6. Roger Scruton, *A Dictionary of Political Thought*, p.213.
7. Adelle Mueller and Jennifer L. Newton, "Introduction: Women Learning About the State," p.4.
8. Dorothy Smith, "An Analysis of Ideological Structures and How Women are Excluded: Considerations for Women's Studies," p.2.
9. Scruton, *op. cit.*, p.200.
10. Sue Findlay, "The Politics of the Women's Movement: Lobbying Our Way to Revolution," pp.22,23.
11. Jan Barnsley, *Feminist Action, Institutional Reaction: Responses to Wife Assault*, p.3.
12. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, p.45.
13. It should be noted that until 1979 both third party reports and accompaniment to police interviews were done by Rape Relief members. After 1979 fewer and fewer Rape Relief members would do that work. The difference between Rape Relief's pre-1979 work and WAVAW's work is qualitative: whereas even in its best days Rape Relief's working agreements with police were informal and subject to the whim of individuals, WAVAW has successfully negotiated formal protocols in the form of written agreements with area police departments. Moreover, the political shifts within Rape Relief after 1979 resulted in increasing antagonism

between that organization and the police with the result that the good will upon which working relations are built was largely lost.

14. In 1988 the Attorney-General's Ministry was split. Police services is now the responsibility of the newly-created Ministry of the Solicitor-General. Whether WAVAW's funding will also be transferred is as yet unclear.
15. Minutes of meeting, June 13, 1983.
16. Deborah Bradley and Ellen Frank, "A Worker's Handbook," p.10.
17. Terms of Reference – Women/Police Liaison Committee, June 1983.
18. Megan Ellis, "Women and Policing: Contact, Conflict and Considerations for Change," p.6.
19. Women's Research Centre, *An Evaluation Guide for Women's Groups*, p.52.
20. Catharine MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence," p.644.
21. Megan Ellis, *op. cit.*, p.7.
22. Barnsley, *op. cit.*, p.85.
23. Working Group on Sexual Violence, *Feminist Manifesto*.
24. cited in Ellis, *op. cit.*, p.28.
25. Charlotte Bunch, "The Reform Tool Kit," p.192.

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